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The ENTERPRISE Memorial

Address to the Peninsula Shipbuilders
Association
by

Rear Admiral T. J. Hamilton, USN (Ret)

Since the dawn of history, man has constantly been striving to attain the pinnacle of perfection in the many fields of endeavor that have embraced him. Through these countless years, it has sometimes happened as a result of a rare combination of circumstances, or developing cultures that there has evolved a matchless and completely superior product or object that has lived throughout the ages as a masterpiece that has defied all attempts to equal it.

Of course, when we speak of perfection, we must begin and end with the only perfect man, our Lord Jesus Christ. But I would like to point out a few examples of perfection in the history of the world.

In the field of architecture and building, I believe that the Parthenon at Athens is recognized as the foremost example of beauty, strength, and grace in man's efforts to build a perfect structure. It was a result of the blending of the ideas, background, and skills of several cultures and many men culminating in that great building still recognized as the ideal.

In art the great painting of Mona Lisa by Leonardo di Vinci has reigned supreme down through the centuries of changing tastes, techniques, and new materials.

When mention of perfection in musical instruments is considered, at once we all think of violins, and the name Stradivarius is immediately recognized as synonymous with the ultimate best in that field.

Tonight we gather to speak about another of those great world masterpieces, the absolute tops in ships and shipbuilding, the USS ENTERPRISE (CV 6.) Her record makes her stand out as the greatest fighting ship in the history of the world, and her name and ability were revered by the fighting men in the Pacific when she, at one time, was the only carrier available to ^{deliver} ~~upload~~ the vital Naval air ~~power~~ fighting so important to all types of ships, to the Marines and to the Army, who were desperately holding a thin line against the Japanese invasion to the south. The "Big E" participated in every campaign of the Pacific War, save one, and has twenty battle stars. Her official record showed 71 ships sunk by her aircraft, 192 ships damaged or sunk, and 911 Jap planes shot down by her guns or aircraft along with untold damage and destruction to Japanese shore installations. Our USS "Constitution" or Lord Nelson's HMS "Victory" records or that of any other ship cannot come close to that record.

In addition to these official accomplishments, one will find greater proof to the matchless greatness of this masterpiece of all fighting ships in the testimony and experience of the many men who came in contact with her. It is a well known fact with Navy men that all ships have a character and different qualities, and I have found almost unanimous agreement that the "Big E" had something over and above other ships. The Commandant of Midshipmen told me the other day that he only visited the ENTERPRISE, but the instant he set foot on her quarterdeck, he could sense and feel her greatness. I think most men, like myself, served in many ships, but all recognize that the "Big E" transcended all others. It made little difference who the Commanding Officer was, or any of the other personnel, for they changed rapidly, but there was a residual championship spirit and built-in "know-how" that was passed down from one hand to another so that ^{she had} ~~there was~~ a soul in addition to the great heart and body of her machinery and structure.

It is the belief of many, and I think it will be recognized in history, that the ENTERPRISE is another of the matchless masterpieces of all time. In her we see again the coming together of a practically limitless combination of circumstances, skills, and men in the rare development of a new and dominant method of conducting war under a fortunate determination of destiny or fate.

The start of this great masterpiece was laid right here at Newport News Shipbuilding & Drydock Company. The strength of her tough hull, the excellence of the workmanship, the contribution of individual artisan's skills, which went into her every part, gave the ENTERPRISE the stamina and ability to absorb terrific damage, and not only to survive, but come back quickly to fight. You builders had a great deal to do with the formation of the underlying spirit and soul of this champion because I am sure the pride of each skilled workman not only was represented in the perfection of his trade, but somehow intangibly became a part of her soul and was picked up in the tremendous pride of the crew who sailed and fought her. You certainly were present and can be credited with a great part in the ability of the "Big E" to recover from three bomb hits and one near miss in the Battle of the ~~Solomons~~ ^{Santa Cruz}, August 24, 1942, aided by that group of Sea Bees who went to sea a few days later to complete repairs while underway to enable her to fly into the Japs next attack.

Of course, the accomplishments of a great list of leaders and the heroic feats of many fliers and ship personnel added to this heritage and tradition and "know-how" which gave strength and courage to all personnel aboard. The greatest Naval leader of world history, Fleet Admiral William Halsey, loved the ENTERPRISE as his favorite ship, and built into her elements of his own character along with that added by Admirals Radford, Reeves, Sherman, and Davidson, and by Butch O'Hare, Killer Kane, Dog Smith, Wade

McCluskey, Jim Flattery, Bill Martin, Gene Lindsay, and all the rest. Every man added something to this ship's character, and in turn absorbed courage and strength from it. This was represented in the sense of urgency and feeling that made our crew determine that they must operate as many planes as the Essex class, and to beat their times in every launching and recovery despite their greater size and side-deck elevators. From this grew the extensive use of the catapult for launching aircraft, pioneered on the "Big E" by Walt Chewning. The first development of night fighters was by Butch O'Hare who lost his life shooting down a Jap attacking group. ~~Our~~ ^{Our} first torpedo squadron, trained to attack with torpedos at night, sank 10 ships at Truk. ~~Its~~ ^{Our} long range search planes made first contact at the Battle of the Phillipine Sea, and later enabled us to track the Jap force. The ENTERPRISE'S work as a night carrier, working around the clock on the attack and interdiction of airfields, had a key part in the final operations of the War. And when last hit by a Kamikazi which blew the No. 1 elevator 400 feet in the air, killing all the immediate officer personnel in the hangar deck, the "know-how" of the crew had the fire under control in 17 minutes and out in a half-hour. Other ships failed to survive such attacks, but the "Big E" shook them off and constantly led in the offensive to bring final victory.

What could be more fitting than the men who built this great ship ~~should~~ ^{join} ~~joining~~ with the men who sailed and fought in her in erecting a memorial tower at Annapolis to pass on this heritage to our future leaders. Admiral Halsey's health failed, and no one else could accomplish the saving of the ship herself as a Naval Museum and Shrine. Probably the greatest memorial is the carrying on of the name ENTERPRISE in the first nuclear carrier, which you are now building. Needless to say, the Navy knows that you will put into this huge proto-type the same devotion and pride of workmanship that you gave the "Big E".

The Enterprise Memorial Tower at Annapolis will support the Flag Mast of the "Big E", and it will be the only one ^{there} to fly our National Ensign. An anchor and first shot of chain from the ENTERPRISE and a suitable plaque will compliment the Tower.

The generosity of Mr. Blewett, Mr. Gauley, Mr. Delany, and all of you who build great ships at this yard, is deeply appreciated by the ENTERPRISE Association, and we thank you for contributing to the erection of this memorial to the greatest fighting ship ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ the history of the world - the USS ENTERPRISE.